Self-Control in Scripture

The Character of God

- **God rules in providential control all the time.** (See Psalm 103:19.)
- **The timing of God’s judgment is right. He is not rash, but carefully and mercifully deals with mankind.** (See Psalm 78:38, 72.)
- **The Spirit manifests self-control in His nature.** (See Galatians 5:22, 23.)
- **Jesus chose not to do His own will in order to do the will of His Father.** (See John 6:38–39.)
- **Even when Jesus was hungry, He still controlled His desire for His basic needs.** (See Luke 4:2–4.)

Picture of Self-Control

Yielding could be seen as a sign of weakness, but yielding to the Lord’s control is how we enter His victorious fortification of strength that enables us to keep ourselves controlled.

The opposite of self-control is pictured in Proverbs 25:28. “He that hath no rule over his own spirit is like a city that is broken down, and without walls.”

Self-Control in My Life

- **Exodus 20:1–17**—In what areas do the Ten Commandments instruct us to exercise self-control?
- **Galatians 5:24–25**—What is the key to developing self-control?
- **Ephesians 4:22–24**—Is it possible for us to control our tongues on our own?
- **James 3:5–8**—Is it possible for us to control our tongues on our own?

Key Concepts

**We are not in control.** The word “self-control” has the subtle implication that we are the “boss” of our lives and, if we decide to, we can overcome our sinful tendencies. However, it would be more accurate to picture ourselves as tools in the hands of a master workman. The extent of our control is in whose hands we will place ourselves. We can yield ourselves as members of righteousness in God’s hands, or by default we are yielded to the kingdom of darkness. (See Romans 6:16–18.) We are “self-controlled” when we yield to God’s control.

**Self-control is yielding, not suppressing, our desires.** We cannot permanently hold in strong feelings such as anger. Suppressing these feelings only delays and often intensifies bitter outbursts. On the other hand, we experience resolution, life, and peace when we use temptations as a signal to center our thoughts on God. (See Romans 8:6.)

**The battle is within.** It is not outside influence that corrupts us. (See Mark 7:21–23.) We are born with a sin nature and our mind is the battlefield. If we lose our focus mentally, we cannot control our actions. But if we delight in the Lord and His Word, we will live victoriously over sin. (See Psalm 119:9–11.) What verses could you memorize that will help you practice self-control?

**Focus on God’s purpose for our God-given desires.** Satan has a destructive misuse for the good things God created:

- God gives us an appetite so we can enjoy the food we need. This appetite is misused when we are gluttonous.
- He designed sleep to rejuvenate our bodies for the work He’s called us to do. However, this desire is misused when we are slothful and neglect our work.
- God gives us a desire for close friendships as an opportunity to invest in others’ lives. This desire is misused when we build friendships only for selfish purposes. (See John 15:13.)

Self-control is less of a struggle when we embrace God’s design for our desires.
Galatians 5:24–25

“And they that are Christ’s have crucified the flesh with the affections and lusts. If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit.”

Memory Verse Game: Knock, Knock, Caught You!

As the children slowly read the verse out loud, they take turns raising their hands on each word. One person sits with his back to the readers so he does not see them. While the children are reciting the verse, the one with his back turned chooses when to knock on the wall. Whoever was raising his hand at the time of the knock switches places with the “knocker.” Everyone quotes the verse aloud again. Continue until everyone can quote the verse without the visual or when each person has had a chance to be the “knocker.”

Doers of the Word

Have the children write about a time they were able to apply this verse in their lives. For example: “My sister was bothering me with her many questions. I wanted to tell her to stop and be quiet, but I knew that was not walking in the Spirit. I asked God to take control of my tongue and He helped me to say kind words to her instead.”
Self-Control in the Life of David

Read I Samuel 26:1–25 as a family, and answer the following questions:

1. **What was Saul’s attitude toward David?** “And Saul was very wroth, and the saying displeased him; and he said, They have ascribed unto David ten thousands, and to me they have ascribed but thousands: what can he have more but the kingdom? And Saul eyed David from that day and forward” (I Samuel 18:8–9). **How should we deal with feelings of anger, jealousy, and fear?**

2. **Knowing Saul was seeking to kill him, what did David do?** “And David arose, and came to the place where Saul had pitched … . So David and Abishai came to the people by night: and, behold, Saul lay sleeping within the trench, and his spear stuck in the ground at his bolster: but Abner and the people lay round about him” (I Samuel 26:5a, 7). **Is there anyone with whom you have a strained relationship?**

3. **Who was Abishai?** “And Abishai, the brother of Joab, the son of Zeruiah, was chief among three. And he lifted up his spear against three hundred, and slew them, and had the name among three. Was he not most honourable of three? therefore he was their captain: howbeit he attained not unto the first three” (II Samuel 23:18–19). **Do the people we trust always make good suggestions?**

4. **What did Abishai suggest to David?** “Then said Abishai to David, God hath delivered thine enemy into thine hand this day: now therefore let me smite him, I pray thee, with the spear even to the earth at once, and I will not smite him the second time” (I Samuel 26:8). **When have you taken matters into your own hands?**

5. **What principle motivated David to control feelings of revenge?** “And David said to Abishai, Destroy him not: for who can stretch forth his hand against the Lord’s anointed, and be guiltless?” (I Samuel 26:9). **What motivates you to do what is right, even when you don’t feel like it?**

6. **What three ways did David think of as to how God could work?** “David said furthermore, As the Lord liveth, the Lord shall smite him; or his day shall come to die; or he shall descend into battle, and perish” (I Samuel 26:10). **Name three possible ways God could resolve a problem you face.**

7. **Did David lack self-control in speaking to Saul?** “And Saul knew David’s voice, and said, Is this thy voice, my son David? And David said, It is my voice, my lord, O king. And he said, Wherefore doth my lord thus pursue after his servant? for what have I done? or what evil is in mine hand?” (I Samuel 26:17–18). **When was a time you spoke respectfully to a difficult person?**
David Refuses to Kill Saul

“The Lord forbid that I should stretch forth mine hand against the Lord’s anointed” (I Samuel 26:11a).
Introduction:
Read to the children: “This month we are asking the Lord to develop self-control in our lives. What a privilege to respond to the work He is doing to change us into the image of His Son! Today we are going to make marshmallow ‘mouths’ as a reminder to ask God to control our mouths. (See Psalm 141:3.) We cannot control our tongues, but if we focus on having a right heart before God, our words will be refined. (See Matthew 12:34.) God is the source of self-control, and as we yield to Him, He will build self-control into our lives.”

Supplies:
Pink and red construction paper, scissors, markers, mini marshmallows, and glue.

Craft Instructions:
Hand each child a sheet of red construction paper and instruct them to cut out two shapes—a heart and a tongue. Write on the heart: “A heart for Jesus” and write on the tongue: “A tongue for Jesus.”

Next, hand each child a sheet of pink construction paper for the mouth. Tell them to cut the corners off, leaving a rounded edge so that the result is a large oval-shaped sheet of paper. [See example.] Fold the pink sheet in half and trim rounded edges to match in shape. Opening up the pink sheet of construction paper, they now have a “mouth”!

Glue the heart onto the upper half of the mouth and the tongue onto the lower part of the mouth.

Glue mini marshmallows around the mouth for “teeth.” Practice self-control by not eating more marshmallows than you are allowed to eat.

Read to the children: “This mouth is a reminder that we cannot control our tongues on our own, but if we give our hearts and minds to Jesus and let Him change our thoughts and motives, then we will speak words of truth and love to others.”
Enjoy meditating and thinking about the words of the memory verse and the definition of *Self-Control* as you find them in the word search below. The underlined words are hidden horizontally, vertically, diagonally, and backwards.

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SGALSIDSJPIDI
SDRPFAUNIGHIH
AOINIOQOEKLS
NGEARNITALAGA
DSDHETTIPRSEP
OTNITPCTUCIFID
ZSAIAMOBEDENCSY
FUAIWFLESHLIV
FORTNFLESTSIRH
TSRINSTANINT
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“**And** they that are Christ’s have *crucified* the **flesh** with the **affections** and **lusts**. If we live in the **Spirit**, let us also **walk** in the **Spirit**” (*Galatians* 5:24–25).

*Self-control*: **Instant obedience** to the **initial promptings** of **God’s Spirit**

*If finding the underlined words is too difficult or frustrating for your child, assign only a couple words to find—such as “And” and “God.” Younger children could point to the ABC’s. Older children may enjoy the extra challenge of finding *all* the words instead of only the underlined words.*
The long hallway stretched darkly before her. Although well-lit, the darkness emanated from its stark, ugly, and utilitarian purpose of moving condemned souls from one area to another. The cold stone floor underfoot seemed to chill the soul as well as the bones. The woman entering Sing Sing prison that Sunday afternoon had a purpose: to lead a religious service for the women prisoners. This particular prison—Sing Sing—had a reputation of holding the worst criminals. That fact alone elevated the hostile feeling in the air.

As the visitor entered the hallway, she heard the loud clunk of the heavy steel door locking securely behind her. Before her, the female prisoners were gathering in the corridor where they would sit for the religious service.

It was only natural that there was a hateful tension between the guards and the incarcerated women, and this afternoon the pent-up anger was set off by a guard’s harsh command. Instantly, the prisoners reacted. Whatever the command had been, it was like a spark setting dry tinder alight, and now the prisoners’ inwardly-nurtured hate and fury flamed hotly to the surface. A riot was erupting!

Desperately the surprised guard called for reinforcements from the men’s section. The ignited women prisoners were proving to be difficult to subdue. The uprising was escalating rapidly.

Suddenly, over the din of curses and filthy shouts, a strong voice was clearly heard, singing these words,

“Yield not to temptation,
For yielding is sin;
Each vict’ry will help you,
Some other to win;
Fight manfully onward,
Dark passions subdue;
Look ever to Jesus,
He will carry you through.”

The tumult subsided as the riled prisoners quieted down to hear the hymn. As the singer began the refrain, other voices softly and tentatively began to join in;

“Ask the Savior to help you,
Comfort, strengthen and keep you;
He is willing to aid you,
He will carry you through.”

The singing grew. Prisoners were ceasing their riotous yells and, compelled by the song, were turning their voices from cursing to singing:

“Yield Not To Temptation”

Hymn History of

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Self-Control is instant obedience to the initial promptings of God’s Spirit

Self-Control is instant obedience to the initial promptings of God’s Spirit
As the song ended, repentant weeping was heard through the stilled hallways. The stunned guards lined up the now-compliant prisoners and directed them back to their cells. Looking upon the faces of the prisoners, it was implausible to think that, just moments before, they had been a howling, out-of-control mob.

It is reported that this simple hymn quelled a prison riot in the Sing Sing prison in Ossining, New York, 30 miles north of New York City. This high-security prison was built in 1825 and is still in operation, nearly 200 years later.

The author of this hymn, “Yield Not to Temptation,” was Horatio Palmer. Palmer lived from 1834 to 1907. How did he come to write a hymn so powerful that it calmed a prison riot? Palmer wrote the following about his writing of the hymn:

“This song is an inspiration. I was at work on the dry subject of ‘Theory’ when the complete idea flashed upon me, and I laid aside the theoretical work and hurriedly penned both words and music as fast as I could write them. I submitted them to the criticism of a friend afterward, and some changes were made in the third stanza, but the first two are exactly as they came to me. I am reverently thankful that it has been a power for good.”

Self-control is “Instant obedience to the initial promptings of God’s Spirit.” It was Palmer’s obedience to the prompting of the Spirit that resulted in this hymn. This hymn is the fruit of his sensitivity to God’s Spirit to set down his “theory study” and write something else. If he’d thought, “This theology is more important—I’ll finish it first,” we might not have this exhortative hymn.

As for the prison riot in Sing Sing—what if the women prisoners had not yielded to the Spirit’s prompting? The riot would have likely continued, and people would have been seriously hurt. If the lone, anonymous person had not obeyed the Spirit’s prompting to sing, what might have happened?

As we are faithful to listen for God’s guidance and obey the promptings He gives, He will carry us through.

Bibliography:
Yield Not to Temptation

Words and Music by Horatio R. Palmer (1834–1907)

1. Yield not to temptation, For yielding is sin, dain,
   Each God's victory hold, we shall help you,
   Look ever to Jesus—He will carry you through.

2. Shun evil companions, Bad language dishonor, true,
   Be fully and earnest, Savior, Our passion subdue,
   Look ever to Jesus—He will carry you through.

3. To him that overcometh God giveth a crown;
   Nor other to win; The strength will renew,
   Ask the Savior to help you, comfort, strength and keep you;

   He is willing to aid you—He will carry you through.